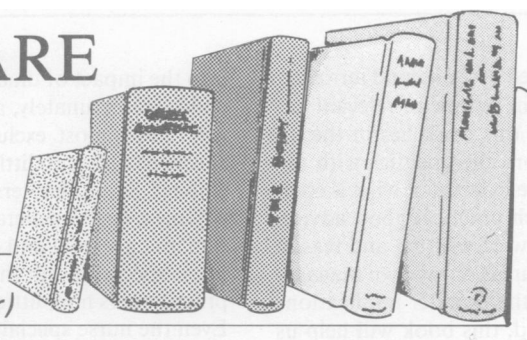


PRIMARY CARE BOOK SHELF

NIGEL STOTT (Reviews Editor)



H.C. DAVIES
G.K. FREEMAN
M. MEAD
R.L. GIBBINS
A.P. PRESLEY

THE USE OF COMPUTERS IN GENERAL PRACTICE

GP library of general practice no. 5

John Preece

Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1983)

193 pages. Price £15.00

SELECTIVE ANTIBIOTIC USE IN RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

A family practice guide

M.T. Everett

MTP Press Limited, Lancaster (1986)

210 pages. Price £24.95

DISEASE DATA BOOK

J. Fry, G. Sandler and D. Brooks

MTP Press Limited, Lancaster (1986)

405 pages. Price £29.95

CARE OF THE CHILD WITH DIABETES

J.D. Baum and A.-L. Kinmonth (Eds)

Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1986)

228 pages. Price £24.00

DIABETES MELLITUS

Diagnosis and treatment (Second edition)

Mayer B. Davidson

John Wiley and Sons, Chichester (1986)

589 pages. Price £25.60

The use of computers in general practice is probably the best 'user friendly' book on the aims and methods of computerization in general practice. It is a must for the novice entering the potential minefield of practice computing since the clear, concise, step-by-step progression in achieving a satisfactory level of competence is invaluable. Here is a book which motivates the general practitioner to achieve the level of practice computing which he feels most comfortable with, whether it be a simple repeat prescription system or fully computerized records with automated standardized hospital referral letters.

Each chapter is crisp and concise, communicating the advantages and disadvantages of each particular stage in the process in simple terms. Lists of aims and objectives, advantages and disadvantages are presented and discussed, and the contents of these features will be readily identifiable by those struggling to make decisions about practice computing. The section on business packages is breathtaking for the opportunities it identifies, and the application of these systems appears to be extremely cost-effective.

The time and effort which will be saved by anyone reading this publication is a tribute to the expertise of the author who, by sharing his knowledge through first-hand experience in general practice, brings the whole subject alive.

There can be little doubt that computers are playing an increasing role in the general practice of the future. The degree of involvement of a computer in any practice will depend on

the motivation of the partners, the skill and training of their staff, and the continual improving and updating of existing systems. This book provides the necessary stimulus to creative and effective computing, so that goals previously thought to be unobtainable now become an exciting reality.

No thinking practice contemplating computerization to any degree should be without this book as a reference source.

H.C.D.

(Huw C. Davies died tragically and unexpectedly shortly after writing this review — he was a pioneer of general practice computing in South Glamorgan. N.C.H.S.)

Selective antibiotic use in respiratory illness is an important book. The illnesses are common and the dilemma whether or not to prescribe an antibiotic is a familiar one. Dr Everett has been interested in respiratory illness for many years and it is a pleasure to see these day-to-day problems addressed in such a scholarly way by an author who writes with a general practitioner's perspective and experience.

Fortunately, the scope of the book extends beyond the limits of the title, for as well as encompassing all common infectious respiratory illnesses there are two excellent short chapters on diarrhoea and vomiting and on pyrexia of unknown origin in children, both of which may have a cause in the respiratory tract, and where parents may expect early antibiotic therapy. Another feature is that non-antibiotic aspects of respiratory problem management get extensive discussion so that the book is able to place antibiotic therapy within a total management scheme.

Dr Everett writes clearly about expert controversy without being dogmatic. For example, in the debate whether to investigate childhood urinary tract infection after the first attack we are advised that we should do so but that if we do not then we must make sure we do not forget to investigate after the second attack. Similarly, having put forward a number of reasons why antibiotics have little place in the management of croup we are told 'antibiotics tend to be prescribed because the situation causes fear and because there is a very small risk of acute epiglottitis. While such prescribing has little scientific justification it cannot be too harshly criticized'. Quite so. Of course in many areas we are still short of good experimental evidence for our treatment policies and I was surprised at Dr Everett's confidence that 'a single starter dose of antibiotic is likely to achieve faster pain relief than simple analgesics', thus justifying a policy of visiting children with earache during the night. There are profound sociological implications here for both doctors and parents. Perhaps an admission of ignorance would have been more appropriate in this case.

Otherwise most clinical policies are soundly based and well argued. The book is unashamedly disease oriented and thus the psychological and sociological parts of the management of

respiratory illness are only briefly covered in the second introductory chapter (the first being an excellent resumé of relevant antibiotic pharmacology). The value of this work lies in the integration of a large body of respiratory therapeutics with the day-to-day experience of general practice in terms of what is common and important, spiced with much practical good advice. This all comes over as a delightful flow of wisdom and reason and certainly illuminates many shady areas of my own management of respiratory illness. Provided the broader implications of the second chapter are kept in mind, this book will help us all try and make sense of the problems our patients bring us. I would like to be able to read books as good as this one in all important areas of general practice.

G.K.F.

The disease data book is my kind of book. It has a didactic, succinct and economic style that has an instant attraction for the fact-seeker rather than the armchair theorist. It covers some 21 medical problems of the kind commonly encountered by general practitioners (hypertension, low backache, cystitis, migraine and the like), examining their definition, incidence, prevalence, natural history and treatment. In addition there is a chapter replete with current statistics on aspects of pregnancy.

It is in the statistics and percentages that the book holds its strongest appeal and reading it is much like browsing through a sort of medical *Guinness book of records*, for example, 80% of the population suffer headaches in a year, 20% of headaches are migraine, 10% of the population consult in general practice for migraine over a 10-year period. Each chapter is a reminder of the years at medical school, cramming in those last few lists of differential diagnosis, investigations and treatments before finals. Certainly the book is a good refresher for the basic facts on these common conditions. On a more critical note there is still a deal of hospital bias in the book — the chapter on diabetes has extensive information on diabetic glomerulosclerosis, diabetic neuropathy, management of hypoglycaemia and diabetic ketosis but little on how general practitioners should follow their diabetics in a mini clinic and, curiously enough, no mention of glycosylated haemoglobin at all.

Nevertheless I could not put my copy down, so stimulated and intrigued was I by the statistics. The book certainly provides a new perspective on what is common and important in general practice.

Covering only medical problems, with for example no paediatrics, gynaecology, family planning, dermatology, this book is perhaps not comprehensive enough to be on a trainee's list of 'best buys'. It is, however, a book worth consulting and covers basic medical conditions very well.

M.M.

Care of the child with diabetes deals with the problems of diabetes in children as seen from the Department of Paediatrics in Oxford, though there are several contributors from other centres. Many of the chapters have been written by the editors and they have been careful to avoid duplication in those contributed by others. There is a wide variation in style in the different chapters with some being much more readable than others, often in inverse relation to the number of appended references.

The book is divided into four sections, covering the scope of the problem, the tools of management, practical aspects of management, and prospects for the future. The first chapter, written by a parent of a diabetic child, gives a valuable insight

into the impact of diabetes on a family as well as the individual child. Unfortunately, after this good beginning, the book concentrates almost exclusively on the provision of care by the specialist unit with little mention of the role of the general practitioner. Some chapters have points of interest for general practitioners, such as dietary control for diabetic children, the initial management and diagnosis of diabetes, and the role of the nurse specialist, but the overall impression given is that general practitioners have little to offer in the care of the diabetic child. Even the nurse specialist, in an otherwise good chapter, makes little mention of liaison with general practitioners. Oxford is fortunate in having enough resources to allow a psychiatrist to attend all paediatric diabetic clinics, but many of the problems discussed in her chapter could have been resolved by a good family doctor, who, alas, is hardly mentioned.

The specialist may say, with some justification, that general practitioners do not take enough interest in the management of diabetes, but a book like this does little to encourage them. Nevertheless, I would hope to find a copy in any postgraduate library, though the content will limit its appeal to general practitioners with a special interest in the subject.

R.L.G.

Diabetes mellitus is written in a crisp but detailed review style. It consists of 10 chapters and after the initial 26-page chapter on diagnosis the remaining chapters deal with the treatment and management of the diabetic patient. Each chapter is summarized. Theories are expounded in various chapters and therefore the book needs to be read completely to obtain the fullest understanding. The reader can then dip into relevant parts once familiarity with the text has been achieved. Written in the USA, it uses imperial units; conversions are given for blood glucose, but not for other biochemical parameters. The nomenclature used is somewhat different to that used in the UK. The text annoyingly refers to other sections without giving their location and the layout is frustratingly disjointed, as tables and graphs always seem to be overleaf. It would have been helpful if some of the detailed argument in the text had been printed in a smaller type size so that the reader could follow the line of practical conclusions without reading the detailed arguments.

The most important chapters for general practice are 'Office management of diabetes, and 'Diabetes education'. The author has co-written the latter with two educators, who may be considered analogous to Health Education Council personnel. The chapter on oral therapy considers chlorpropamide only. Biguanides are not mentioned, which, despite their therapeutic limitations, must be an oversight. Algorithms are used to explain treatment plans and that for type 2 diabetes is particularly useful.

Stabilization of the new diabetic on insulin and the badly controlled diabetic are considered in depth. The sliding scale method which was most often used when I was in practice is criticized, the author preferring a standard twice daily injection regimen based on post-prandial blood glucose levels measured twice daily. The chapter on dietetics is detailed, and is relevant to the understanding of how a diabetic diet is constructed. This chapter can also be commended to the general practitioner. The references are up to date but rely heavily on the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Diabetic Care*.

In summary, this is a worthwhile volume, aimed at those wishing to improve their care of diabetes, but because of its transatlantic approach its applicability in the UK is somewhat limited.

A.P.P.